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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 005135

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [KU](#) [FREEDOM](#) [AGENDA](#)
SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: AMBASSADOR URGES WORDS TO MATCH
ACTIONS ON TOLERANCE, NOTES U.S. INTEREST IN REDISTRICTING

REF: A. KUWAIT 5100

- [1](#)B. KUWAIT 5083
- [1](#)C. KUWAIT 5016
- [1](#)D. KUWAIT 4590

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Kuwait FM Shaykh Dr. Mohammed told the Ambassador December 14 that Kuwait had a strong record of encouraging religious tolerance and did not need to respond to calls by extremists to limit the construction of places of worship other than mosques. The Ambassador agreed the GOK has an established history of supporting Christian and other groups in Kuwait, but encouraged the GOK to condemn discriminatory statements made by elected officials and to allocate more land for the construction of churches. The Ambassador congratulated the GOK on the progress made toward passing the Press and Publications Law and said noted the apparent stall in progress on proposals to reduce the number of electoral constituencies. He said the U.S. considered electoral redistricting to be an important element of Kuwait's political reform agenda and it would strengthen democratic institutions by lessening the influence of personalities and tribal relations on politics. The FM argued that the size of the districts was a domestic issue and had no bearing on Kuwait's commitment to strengthening democracy.

Preaching What You Practice

[1](#)2. (C) During a December 14 meeting with the Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, the Ambassador congratulated the GOK on progress related to the Press and Publications Law, noting it was a positive step in efforts to strengthen democracy in Kuwait. On a less positive note, the Ambassador regretted statements repeated in the press by Islamist ideologue MP Walid Al-Tabtabaie that licenses for construction churches or other places of worship should be denied. He said such statements contradicted Kuwait's history of religious tolerance and he encouraged the GOK to disassociate itself from such views. The FM countered that the MP's words were protected, free speech and that his views were not new and the GOK simply ignored them. He added that Kuwait has provided land, often prime real estate, to religious groups and that its actions were sufficient proof of its tolerance. The Ambassador appreciated the GOK's actions, noted that this is an instance where words might help as well, and encouraged the GOK to grant more land to religious groups which were outgrowing their facilities.

FM on Redistricting: Watch and Wait

[1](#)3. (C) Turning to the debate on reducing the number of

electoral constituencies, the Ambassador said Parliament's decision to delay discussion was unfortunate (septel). He reviewed the U.S. policy to promote and strengthen democratic practices and institutions and said the GOK's electoral reform proposals were important to Kuwait's political reform.

The FM questioned U.S. interest in the redistricting plans and argued that the matter was a "very local, domestic issue," asserting "it has nothing to do with the level of freedom we give our MPs and the electoral process." He expressed concern that U.S. interest in redistricting would lead some MPs to believe there was international pressure for electoral reform and recommended we "sit back, watch, and enjoy the debate." In contrast, Shaykh Dr. Mohammed said the May 16 decision to grant suffrage to Kuwaiti women was an international issue and merited U.S. and international attention. He further encouraged the U.S. to take note of the December 13 decision to open the voter registration lists in January 2006, one month early.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador thanked the FM for his comments, and restated that the U.S. views the proposals to decrease the number of electoral constituencies and thereby limit the influence of personality and tribe on Kuwaiti politics as a key element of Kuwait's efforts to promote and strengthen democracy. So as not to detract from the debate, the U.S. would not make public statements on the issue, but would continue to discuss the topic with GOK officials and Kuwaiti politicians.

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